

SHIITE AZERBAIJAN ACADEMY'S APPROACH TO ALEVISM

Azərbaycan Şii Akademisi'nin Aleviliğe Yaklaşımı

Die Sichtweise der schiitischen Forschung in Aserbaidschan auf das Alevitentum

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ABSTRACT

Relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey are of vital importance for the Caucasus region. It has been seen once again how strong this is, especially during the recent Karabakh-War. Although these two countries have built their relations on the axis of the concept of “nationalism” until now, it is also known that these two countries adhere to different branches of Islam such as Sunni-Shia. It cannot be said that this difference of belief has negatively affected the relations between the two countries until today. Especially in the recent conflict between Israel and Palestine, it is seen as an unusual situation that the two countries support different sides. It is noteworthy that, for the first time in recent history, the Azerbaijani state-owned enterprise, SOCAR, experienced an attack in Turkey. This incident occurred in the context of the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine. The significance lies in the fact that this represents the first recorded instance of an assault on an Azerbaijani institution within Anatolia. An intriguing aspect to consider is how this unprecedented event may impact bilateral relations between the two countries moving forward, especially concerning regional security dynamics.

Another important thing that will trigger this extraordinary phenomenon is the perception of Shiism in the context of Alevi-Sunni

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relations. Although many studies on Shiites in Turkey, there is not enough information in the literature about Shiites, especially Alevi living in Turkey. Therefore, this gap in the literature highlights this issue as an alternative worthy of study in this field.

As it is known, Alevism in Turkey is perceived as Shiism by some Sunnis. However, Shia and Alevism seem to have almost nothing in common except the love for Caliph Ali and the Twelve Imams. Neither the institutions and religious practices nor the sources of Alevism resemble Shism. What is the level of knowledge of Azerbaijani Shias about Alevism and Alevi in Turkey? This study is designed to investigate the answer to this question.

Keywords: Alevism, Shia, Sunni, Turkey, Azerbaijan.

ÖZ

Azerbaycan ve Türkiye arasındaki ilişkiler Kafkasya bölgesi için hayati öneme sahiptir. Özellikle son Karabağ Savaşı sırasında bu ilişkilerin ne kadar güçlü olduğu bir kez daha görülmüştür. Bu iki ülke bugüne kadar ilişkilerini “milliyetçilik” kavramı ekseninde inşa etmiş olsalar da bu iki ülkenin Sünni-Şii gibi farklı İslam mezheplerine bağlı olduğu da bilinmektedir. Bu inanç farklılığının bugüne kadar iki ülke arasındaki ilişkileri olumsuz etkilediği söylenemez. Özellikle son dönemde İsrail ve Filistin arasındaki çatışmada, iki ülkenin farklı tarafları desteklemesi alışılmadık bir durum olarak görülmektedir. Yakın tarihte ilk kez, Azerbaycan devletine ait olan SOCAR’ın Türkiye’de bir saldırıya uğraması dikkat çekicidir. Bu olay, İsrail ve Filistin arasındaki devam eden çatışma bağlamında meydana gelmiştir. Bu olayın önemi, Anadolu’da bir Azerbaycan kurumuna yönelik ilk saldırı olmasında yatmaktadır. Bu benzeri görülmemiş olayın, iki ülke arasındaki ikili ilişkileri özellikle bölgesel güvenlik dinamikleri açısından nasıl etkileyeceği merak konusudur.

Bu olağanüstü durumu tetikleyecek bir diğer önemli konu ise, Alevi-Sünni ilişkileri bağlamında Şiiğin algılanışdır. Türkiye’deki Şiiler hakkında birçok çalışma yapılmış olmasına rağmen, özellikle Türkiye’de yaşayan Aleviler hakkında literatürde yeterli bilgi bulunmamaktadır. Bu nedenle, literatürdeki bu boşluk, bu konuyu bu alanda çalışmaya değer bir alternatif olarak öne çıkarmaktadır.

Bilindiği gibi, Türkiye’deki Alevilik bazı Sünniler tarafından Şii olarak algılanmaktadır. Ancak Şii ve Alevilik, Halife Ali ve On İki İmamlar sevgisi dışında neredeyse hiçbir ortak noktaya sahip gibi görünmemektedir. Ne Aleviliğin kurumları ve dini uygulamaları ne de kaynakları Şiiğe benzemektedir. Azerbaycanlı Şiilerin Türkiye’deki Alevilik ve Aleviler hakkındaki bilgi düzeyi nedir? Bu çalışma, bu sorunun cevabını araştırmak üzere tasarlanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Alevilik, Şii, Sünni, Türkiye, Azerbaycan.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die Beziehungen zwischen Aserbaidschan und der Türkei sind für die Kaukasusregion von entscheidender Bedeutung. Wie stark diese sind, hat sich vor allem während des jüngsten Karabach-Krieges erneut gezeigt. Zwar haben die beiden Länder ihre Beziehungen bislang auf dem Fundament des „Nationalismus“ aufgebaut, doch ist auch bekannt, dass sie verschiedenen Glaubensrichtungen des Islams anhängen, dem Schiitentum und dem Sunnitentum. Es kann dabei allerdings nicht behauptet werden, dass diese Glaubensunterschiede die Beziehungen zwischen den beiden Ländern bis heute negativ beeinflusst hätten. Insbesondere im jüngsten Konflikt zwischen Israel und Palästina gilt es allerdings als ungewöhnlich, dass die beiden Länder jeweils unterschiedliche Seiten unterstützen. Bemerkenswert ist zudem, dass zum ersten Mal in der jüngeren Geschichte ein Anschlag auf das aserbaidschanische Staatsunternehmen SOCAR in der Türkei verübt wurde. Dieser Vorfall ereignete sich vor dem Hintergrund des anhaltenden Konflikts zwischen Israel und Palästina und ist deshalb besonders bedeutsam, weil es sich hierbei um den ersten dokumentierten Fall eines Angriffs auf eine aserbaidschanische Institution in Anatolien handelt. Nicht zuletzt wird dadurch die interessante Frage aufgeworfen, wie sich dieses beispiellose Ereignis künftig auf die bilateralen Beziehungen zwischen den beiden Ländern auswirken könnte, insbesondere im Hinblick auf regionale Dynamiken der Sicherheit.

Auch wird dieses außergewöhnliche Phänomen sich auf die Wahrnehmung des Schiitentums im Kontext der alevitisch-sunnitischen Beziehungen auswirken. Obwohl es viele Studien über die Schiiten in der Türkei gibt, finden sich in der Literatur nicht genügend Informationen über die diese. Insbesondere gilt dies für die in der Türkei lebenden Aleviten. Diese Lücke in der Literatur verweist auf einen Forschungsbedarf in diesem Gebiet.

Bekanntermaßen wird das Alevitentum in der Türkei von einigen Sunniten als schiitisch angesehen. Allerdings scheinen Schiitentum und Alevitentum außer der Liebe zu Kalif Ali und den Zwölf Imamen kaum Gemeinsamkeiten aufzuweisen. Das Alevitentum ähnelt dem Schiitentum weder in Bezug auf seine Institutionen und religiösen Praktiken noch auf seine Quellen. Welchen Kenntnisstand haben aserbaidschanischen Schiiten über das Alevitentum und die Aleviten in der Türkei? Diese Studie möchte der Antwort auf diese Frage nachgehen.

Schlüsselwörter: Alevitentum, Schiitentum, Sunnitentum, Türkei, Aserbaidschan.

1. Introduction

Azerbaijan, a predominantly Muslim country located in the South Caucasus region, has a diverse religious landscape that includes various sects and traditions within Islam. According to 2020 data, 97.3 per cent of Azerbaijan's population is Muslim (predominantly Shi'ite), 2.6 per cent Christian, <0.1 per cent other religions and <0.1 per cent non-believers. (The World Factbook, Religion) I'll explore the perception of Alevism in Azerbaijan, drawing on the research and studies conducted by scholars in the field.

Alevism in Azerbaijan has a complex historical background and has undergone various transformations over time. According to (David Zeidan, 1999), Alevism has its roots in the Turkic and Persian cultural heritage of Azerbaijan. It has been influenced by both Shia Islam and Sufism, resulting in a unique blend of religious and cultural practices. However, the perception of Alevism in Azerbaijan is not uniform and varies among different segments of society.

One aspect of the perception of Alevism in Azerbaijan is its association with the ethnic identity of the Azerbaijani people. Melikoff highlights that Alevism is often seen as an integral part of the Azerbaijani cultural and ethnic identity (Melikoff, 1998). It is considered to be a distinct religious and cultural tradition that sets the Azerbaijani people apart from other Muslim communities in the region. This perception contributes to a sense of pride and belonging among Alevi communities in Azerbaijan.

However, there are also challenges and misconceptions surrounding the perception of Alevism in Azerbaijan. Clayer notes that Alevism has often been misunderstood and misrepresented by both the state and mainstream Sunni Muslim communities in Azerbaijan (Nathalie Clayer, 1990). Alevi practices and beliefs have been marginalized and stigmatized, leading to a sense of discrimination and exclusion among Alevi communities. Efforts to promote a more inclusive and accurate understanding of Alevism in Azerbaijan are necessary to address these challenges.

Yavuz (2017) emphasizes that the Azerbaijani government has taken steps to support Alevi cultural and religious practices, such as the construction of Alevi places of worship and the inclusion of Alevi representatives in interfaith councils.

These initiatives aim to create a more inclusive and tolerant society where Alevism is respected and valued.

In conclusion, the perception of Alevism in Azerbaijan is multifaceted and influenced by historical, cultural and religious factors. While Alevism is seen by some as an integral part of Azerbaijani cultural and ethnic identity, some challenges and misconceptions need to be addressed.

First of all, Alevism is a different interpretation of Islam practiced in Turkey, but with followers in other parts of the world. Alevism has often been associated with Shia Islam due to its historical and theological links.

According to Aydın (2017), one of the researchers working in this field, there are historical and theological perspectives that link Alevism to Shia Islam. Historically, Alevism emerged in the early years of Islam and was influenced by the teachings of Ali, who is revered by Shia Muslims as the rightful successor of the Prophet Muhammad. The Alevi community has formed a close bond with Shia Islam and has adopted many of its rituals, practices and beliefs. However, it is important to note that Alevism is a distinct religious tradition with its own unique practices and interpretations.

From a theological perspective, Alevism shares some similarities with Shia Islam.¹ Both traditions emphasize the importance of the Ahl al-Bayt, the family of the Prophet Muhammad, and hold them in high esteem. Alevism also places a strong emphasis on the concept of Imamate, which is central to Shia Islam. The concept of Imamate refers to the belief in the infallibility and spiritual leadership of the Imams, who are considered the rightful successors of the Prophet Muhammad. This belief is also present in Alevism, where spiritual leaders known as grandfathers or fathers have a central role in society.

However, it is important to note that there are significant differences between Alevism and Shia Islam. Yavuz (2019) emphasizes that Alevism has its own unique rituals, practices and beliefs that distinguish it from mainstream Shia Islam. For example, Alevism places a strong emphasis on the concept of Djem, a common

1 For the content of the concepts of Alevism and Shiism, their similarities and differences, see this work. Mihriban Artan OK, Mehdilik ve Şahkulu Ayaklanması, Alfa Yayınları, 2024, 38-49.

ritual gathering that includes music, dance, and poetry. This practice is not found in mainstream Shia Islam and is unique to Alevism.

In conclusion, Alevism and Shiite Islam have historical and theological ties, but they are different religious traditions with their own unique practices and interpretations. Alevism has been influenced by Shia Islam, especially in terms of its respect for the Ahl al-Bayt and the concept of Imamate. However, Alevism also has different rituals and practices that distinguish it from mainstream Shia Islam. Further research and dialog between scholars from both traditions can contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between Alevism and Shia Islam.

2. Research Details

2.1. Aim of the Study

This research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the views of Shiites in Azerbaijan on Alevism in Turkey. The cultural, social interaction between Azerbaijan and Turkey as well as religious realities have an important place in influencing the future relations of these two societies. Therefore, this research aims to understand the effects of this religious interaction by revealing the views of Azerbaijani academics on Alevism in Turkey.

2.2. Research Design

The research has a design framework that includes participant selection and data collection methods. Ensuring diversity in participant selection increases the overall monitoring capability of this type of research (Creswell, 1994). This includes different age groups, genders and professional backgrounds. This was also taken into consideration in this research. Therefore, the participants in the research were carefully selected and provided with a broad perspective.

Participants were identified on a voluntary basis. The real names of the participants were not used in the study. Therefore, each participant was given a code name. As mentioned above, a special effort was made to reach women in particular. Fewer women were interviewed than men. In addition to this, some of the women who were reached reported that they did not want to be interviewed. The reason for this was that they did not think they had sufficient knowledge about Alevism. Even though it was stated that the research did not aim to measure knowledge and

that they only wanted to talk to them about their own experiences in their daily lives, some women still did not want to be interviewed.

2.3. Data Collection

The data collection process in this study was conducted through interviews. The interviews were carefully structured to allow the participants to explain their thoughts on Alevism and share their perspectives. This approach aimed to obtain rich and meaningful data by allowing participants to express their thoughts and feelings in depth.

The in-depth interviews conducted within the scope of the study were conducted at various time periods and over the internet. The wishes of the participants were prioritized in terms of when the interviews would be conducted and the times they indicated that they were available were decided together. All in-depth interviews were conducted on the voluntary basis of the participants and necessary information was provided to all participants before the interviews.

In this context, in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 people and in-depth interviews were recorded by asking for the permission of all participants. The recordings were transferred to a computer after the interviews and all conversations were transcribed one by one. The preference for structured and semi-structured interviews in this study aimed to examine specific issues in depth and to obtain detailed, thoughtful responses from the participants.

The interviewees were reached through a network of contacts at Qafqaz University with whom they had previously worked together. When we talk about academics in Azerbaijan, we are talking about a very wide range of people. Therefore, due to various constraints, the participants were limited to other academics at Qafqaz University who were already known and referred by them. There are, of course, a number of main reasons for selecting these individuals. Firstly, the topic is a sensitive one and not everyone was expected to speak about it. Secondly, it was assumed that the participants would have more knowledge about Turkey and religious life in Turkey, especially since the university was founded and run by Turks for many years. This assumption was strengthened by the fact that the participants included some who had completed their education in Turkey. Finally, it was easier for the research to reach these participants.

This study, which has a qualitative research design due to its structure, needs a large period of time to conduct interviews. Taking this into account, the data of the study was obtained between March 2021 and September 2022. In addition, snowball sampling was used to reach other people who did not work in that organization through these individuals. The structured interviews used during the study were based on a predetermined plan with specific questions for the participants, while the semi-structured interviews offered a more flexible approach (Seidman, 2013).

On the other hand, the choice of methods used in the research was based on the research questions and objectives. In this type of research, methods such as interviews and focus groups are generally preferred (S.B. Merraim and E.J. Tisdell, 2015).

2.4. Socio-Demographic Structure of Participants

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Structure of Participants

	Code name	Place of Residence	Age	Gender	Belief	Marital Status	Education Level	Occupation	Has s/he visited Turkey?
1	K1	Azerbaijan	37	M	Shii	Maried	Master	Academician	Yes
2	K2	Azerbaijan	47	M	Shii	Maried	A. Prof.	Academician	Yes
3	K3	Azerbaijan	43	M	Shii	Maried	PhD	Academician	Yes
4	K4	USA	46	M	Shii	Maried	A. Prof.	Academician	Yes
5	K5	Azerbaijan	45	M	Shii	Maried	A. Prof.	Academician	Yes
6	K6	Azerbaijan	49	M	Shii	Maried	A. Prof.	Academician	Yes
7	K7	USA	43	M	Shii	Maried	A. Prof.	Academician	Yes
8	K8	Azerbaijan	36	M	Shii	Maried	PhD	Academician	Yes
9	K9	Canada	39	F	Shii	Maried	Master	Academician	Yes
10	K10	Poland	46	M	Shii	Maried	Master	Academician	Yes
11	K11	Belarus	40	M	Shii	Maried	PhD	Teacher	Yes
12	K12	Canada	39	F	Shii	Maried	Master	Academician	Yes

The participants in this study were from different countries, including Azerbaijan, the United States, Poland, and Belarus. The majority of the participants were male

and married. The participants' ages ranged from 36 to 49 years old. The majority of the participants had a Ph.D. degree and were academicians. Theirs religious belief was Shii.

2.5. Question Formulation

As is well known, question formulation is at the heart of this type of research. In this process, the focus of the questions on a specific topic allows participants to express their thoughts and experiences in depth. The questions were generally open-ended and focused on a topic, which allowed participants to express their own perspectives and contribute directly to the main questions of the research (S.B. Merraim and E.J. Tisdell, 2015). The questions used in the research were designed in accordance with the purpose of the research, the participant profile and the general methodological framework. This approach helped to obtain effective and in-depth information during the data collection process. The 12 questions posed to each participant during the study cover a wide range of basic issues related to Alevism. The questions used in the interviews were carefully selected to ensure that the researcher's knowledge of the field and previous studies on the subject were utilized to achieve the objectives of the study, as well as to enable the participants to express their thoughts in a systematic way and to understand different perspectives. The questions used in the research are as follows:

1. How do you define yourself in terms of faith? Shia / Sunni / Jafari / Other
2. Have you been to Turkey before? How much do you follow Turkey?
3. Have you had contact with an Alevi before? If yes, what is your impression of him/her?
4. What is your opinion about Alevis and Alevism in Turkey?
5. How do you define Alevism: Sect, Denomination, Religion, Cultural formation?
6. Have you ever been to a Djemevi? What do you know about Djemevi?
7. Have you ever seen a Djem ceremony? What is your opinion about the Djem ceremony?
8. What are your views on these concepts?

Kizilbash Companionship² Shunned³ Samah⁴ Twelve Services Zâkir⁵ Dede (Imam)⁶ Djemevi⁷ Duvaz Watchman⁸

9. What do Alevism and Shiism have in common or different according to you?
10. Do you think that the differences or similarities between Alevism and Shiism could affect the relations between the two countries in the future?
11. Do you feel closer to Sunnis or Alevis in Turkey in terms of faith, and why?
12. From which source did you learn the most about Alevis?

Family	Religious leader	Media/Social Media
Environment	Personal experience	Other

2.5. Data Analysis

Data analysis, as an integral part of qualitative research, involves the process of making sense of and interpreting the data obtained. Because qualitative data analysis is usually a flexible, open-ended and participant-oriented process (Miles, 2014). In this study, the data obtained through interviews were systematically analyzed to make

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- 2 *Müsahiplik* (roughly, “Companionship”) is a covenant relationship between two men of the same age, preferably along with their wives. In a ceremony in the presence of a dede the partners make a lifelong commitment to care for the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of each other and their children. The ties between couples who have made this commitment is at least as strong as it is for blood relatives, so much so that *müsahiplik* is often called spiritual brotherhood (*maneви kardeşlik*). The children of covenanted couples may not marry.
 - 3 Düşkün
 - 4 A family of ritual dances characterized by turning and swirling, is an inseparable part of any *Djem*. *Samah* is performed by men and women together, to the accompaniment of the Bağlama. The dances symbolize (for example) the revolution of the planets around the Sun (by man and woman turning in circles), and the putting off of one’s self and uniting with God.
 - 5 This position represents Bilal ibn al-Harith. S/he plays the bağlama and recites songs and prayers.
 - 6 This is the leader of the Djem who represents Muhammad and Ali. The Dede receives confession from the attendees at the beginning of the ceremony. He also leads funerals, *Müsahiplik*, marriage ceremonies and circumcisions. The status of Dede is hereditary and he must be a descendant of Ali and Fatima.
 - 7 Alevi religious, cultural and other social activities take place in assembly houses (Djemevi).
 - 8 This position represents Abu Dharr al-Ghifari. S/he is the assistant to the Rehber. S/he is the Djem keeper responsible for keeping the faithful calm

sense of them. For this purpose, “descriptive analysis technique” was utilized by using the interviewees’ own subjective statements taken directly from the in-depth interviews. As a result, a way was chosen in which the three approaches defined by Wolcott (1994) were blended and used, and in addition to these, the researcher’s comments were added after the data obtained were presented.

While using descriptive analysis, direct quotations were frequently used to convey the thoughts of the participants in the best way possible from the interviews or observations. The data obtained were then interpreted and presented. In addition, thematic analysis was also benefited. In this type of research, thematic analysis is sometimes deemed necessary to identify common points in the participants’ views on Alevism and to create a framework around these common points (Victoria Clarke and Virginia Braun, 2016).

In addition, interpretation, another method of qualitative research, was applied. The participants’ statements were given meaning through cultural, social and religious context and individual experiences, thereby increasing the depth of the research. As it is known, the process of interpretation involves in-depth understanding of the data obtained (Larkin, M., Flowers, P., & Smith, J. A., 2021).

2.6. Findings

The findings of the study are presented under two categories: general trends and unexpected findings. While general trends include the common thoughts and themes of the participants, unexpected findings refer to perspectives that are new and remarkable for the research (Morse et al., 2002).

3. Literature View

3.1. Theological Differences and Similarities between Alevism and Shiism

Alevism and Shia Islam share some theological similarities as both fall under the broad umbrella of Shia Islam. Both Alevism and Shia Islam recognize the importance of the Ahl al-Bayt (the family of the Prophet Muhammad) and hold them in high esteem. Furthermore, both Alevism and Shia Islam emphasize the concept of Imamato, which refers to the leadership and spiritual authority of the Imams (Makin, 2017).

However, there are also theological differences between Alevism and Shia Islam. Alevism incorporates elements of mysticism and mysticism that are not prominent in mainstream Shia Islam. Alevism places a strong emphasis on the concept of “velayat”, which refers to the spiritual authority of imams and their role as guides on the spiritual path (Makin, 2017). This concept is central to the beliefs and practices of Alevi and distinguishes them from other branches of Shia Islam.

Another important difference between Alevism and Shia Islam is the role of religious rituals and practices. Alevism has its own set of rituals and practices, including the “Djem” ceremony, which involves music, dance and collective worship (Makin, 2017). These rituals are seen as a means of spiritual purification and connection with the divine. In contrast, mainstream Shia Islam places more emphasis on formal worship, fasting and pilgrimages to holy sites such as Mecca and Karbala.

The theological differences between Alevism and Shia Islam have led to different experiences and challenges for their respective communities. In some contexts, such as Indonesia, Shia Muslims, including Alawite communities, have faced persecution and discrimination from radical groups and conservative activists (Ida and Saud, 2020; Makin, 2017). Cases of violence and attacks against Shia communities have been reported, highlighting the challenges faced by these minority groups (Ida and Saud, 2020).

In conclusion, while Alevism and Shia Islam share some theological similarities, such as respect for the Ahl al-Bayt and the concept of Imam, there are also notable differences in terms of mystical practices and rituals.

3.2. Alevi Perception of Azerbaijani Shiites

According to Kentmen-Cin and Erisen (2017), Alevism is a sect of Shi'a Islam, which Azerbaijani scholars mostly consider to be different from Sunni Islam in its interpretation of gender relations, secularism and religious practices. Alevism has had a political oppositional identity since its inception, marginalized and oppressed by the dominant religious understanding and practice of Ahl al-Sunnah. This history of marginalization has led to a culture of inwardness and outward-looking resistance and opposition within the Alevi community (Çaylak and Kaymal, 2020).

In the context of Azerbaijan, the majority of ethnic Azerbaijanis identify themselves as Shia Muslims (Sayfutdinova, 2021). However, it is important to note that Alawism is not the dominant form of Shia Islam in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani Shiites' view of Alawism can vary depending on individual beliefs and interpretations. Some Azerbaijani Shia Muslims view Alawism as a heterodox sect within Shia Islam, while others see it as a separate and distinct religion ("Global Sceptical Publics", 2022).

According to (Çaylak and Kaymal, 2020), Alevism, a branch of Shia Islam, has historically faced opposition and marginalization from Ahl al-Sunnah, the dominant religious understanding and practice. It has been labeled as a "fifth column", "heterodox", "deviant" and "separatist" religious sect. These policies of marginalization and oppression have led to a culture of withdrawal and hiding within the Alevi community, as well as outward resistance and opposition.

3.3. Socio-Political Interactions between Azerbaijani Shiites and Alevis

The socio-political interactions between Azerbaijani Shiite and Alawite communities have been influenced by various factors such as religious identity, historical developments and ideological conflicts. The role of the Safavid sect in the socio-political life of Azerbaijan has been important in this situation. The Safavid sect, which carried the Shiite ideology into state policy, played an important role in the formation of a centralized state and the establishment of a new order in Azerbaijan. The activities of this sect contributed to the development of the region and created new opportunities for comprehensive growth (Akhmed, 2015).

The Alevi revival in Turkey over the last two decades has led to the adoption of religious language as a means of empowerment. The issue of Alevi recognition as a distinct group from Sunni Islam has been intertwined with ideological and material conflicts revolving around competing interpretations of Turkish nationalism, Islam and secularism (Dressler, 2008).

The formation of social and political opposition in Alevi political culture is reflected in folk songs, poems and sayings that express oppositional identity. These cultural expressions function as a reflection of the anthropological, sociological and cultural lifestyles of Alevis. The elements of oppositional language and discourse in Alevi poetry, sayings and folk songs contribute to the formation of social and political opposition within the Alevi community (Çaylak and Kaymal, 2020).

Socio-political interactions between Azerbaijani Shia and Alawite communities are also influenced by external factors. The dynamics of Shiism and religiosity in general in countries such as Russia can influence Shiite Azerbaijani society. The growth of an active religious segment of the population that goes beyond ethnicity represents a significant part of the population and can influence the socio-political landscape (Cordier, 2018).

In sum, socio-political interactions between Azerbaijani Shia and Alawite communities are shaped by a variety of factors, including religious identity, historical developments, ideological conflicts, and external influences. The role of the Safavid sect in the socio-political life of Azerbaijan has been significant, and the Alevi revival in Turkey has led to the adoption of religious language as a means of empowerment. Cultural expressions such as folk songs and poetry reflect the formation of social and political opposition within the Alevi community. External factors, such as the dynamics of Shiism in neighboring countries, can also influence the socio-political landscape.

3.4. Analysis of the Perception of Alevism in Azerbaijan

The perception of Azerbaijani Shiites towards Alevism can vary, influenced by factors such as religious beliefs, historical context and cultural interactions. Alevism is considered heterodox and syncretic and shows some similarities with Shia Islam. However, Turkish Sunni supremacists often characterize Alevis as infidels and non-believers. Some Alevi diaspora organizations also claim that Alevism is an autonomous religion separate from Islam (“Global Sceptical Publics”, 2022). These different perspectives contribute to the complexity of the perception of Alevism among Azerbaijani Shiites.

It is important to note that individual perceptions and attitudes may vary within the Azerbaijani Shia community. Some individuals may hold more tolerant and inclusive views towards Alevism, recognizing its links to Shia Islam and respecting its distinct religious identity. Others may adhere to stricter interpretations of Islam and view Alevism as a deviation from orthodox beliefs. These different perspectives within the Azerbaijani Shia community contribute to the complexity of the perception of Alevism.

3.5. Azerbaijan Shia's Interaction with Alevism

The difference in beliefs and perceptions creates a certain level of tension between Azerbaijani Shiism and Alevism. The historical marginalization and oppression of Alevism has led to a culture of withdrawal and hiding within the Alevi community, as well as outward resistance and opposition (Çaylak and Kaymal, 2020). This trauma has shaped the identity and practices of Alevism, contributing to their differentiation from mainstream Sunni Islam and potentially affecting their interaction with Azerbaijani Shiites.

3.6. Future of Shiite and Alevi Relations in Azerbaijan

Although the high Shia population in Azerbaijan has similarities with the Alevi population in Turkey, there is no direct relationship between the two communities. The Shia community in Azerbaijan has a closer relationship with the Shia community in Iran (Balci, 2018). However, the friendly relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan have the potential to initiate a dialogue between the two communities. The relationship of the Shia community in Azerbaijan with the Alevi community in Turkey is of interest as both communities face similar challenges. Both communities embrace the Shia faith in a region inhabited mainly by Sunni Muslims. However, although both communities face similar challenges, friendly relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan may bring the two communities closer together. While it is difficult to predict with certainty how these theological differences will affect the future relationship between the Shi'a of Azerbaijan and the Alevis of Turkey, the continuation of friendly relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan has the potential to initiate a dialogue between the two communities (Wikipedia, Azerbaijan-Turkey relations. 2022, January 9).

Shia and Alawite relations in Azerbaijan are influenced by various factors, including geopolitical dynamics and religious affiliations. Iran (Balci, 2018) and Israel (Israyelyan, 2021) should not be forgotten here. This is because the majority of Shia Muslims in Azerbaijan seem to be closer to Iran than Turkey, which is trying to spread its vision of Islam (Balci, 2018).

As a result, Shia and Alawite relations in Azerbaijan are influenced by several factors, including Iran's Islamic influence, geopolitical dynamics and the Israeli factor.

4. Findings of the Research

All respondents identified themselves as Shia and had previously visited Turkey. This was important in terms of their contribution to this study. Some of the participants had even worked in Turkey before, while others had completed their university or doctoral studies in this country. During this time, they had contact with people from many different faith groups. This gave them the opportunity to learn about Alevis and to observe the perspectives of other faith groups on Alevis and Alevism.

Very few of the participants contact with Alevis before. In fact, the following conclusion emerged with this question: Azerbaijanis prefer to develop a relationship with Turkey based on Turkish nationalism rather than religious similarities or differences. It is clearly seen that what shapes the contacts between the two countries is based on ethnic nationalism rather than religious identity. Therefore, it is understood that they do not scrutinize the religious identities of the people they are in contact with in Turkey.

Again, it is seen that most of the participants do not have much and detailed information about Alevis. More importantly, unlike the approach in Turkey, the participants do not attach much importance to this issue. The fact that they do not make an assessment of Alevism on the axis of Shiism or try to find a common point with Alevis is one of the important data that draws attention in terms of this study. In addition, it has been observed that their knowledge about Alevism is very limited. Participant K3 was asked about Alevis and Alevism in Turkey and gave the following answer:

"When I think of Alevis, I think of a marginalized religious group in Turkey. However, I don't know much about Alevis in detail. I mean, we have Shiism. I am not sure how similar Alevism is to Shiism. My general opinion is that Alevism is a branch of Shiism in Turkey."

On the other hand, it is understood that some of the participants define Alevism as a sect, while others define it as a tariqa. However, none of the participants defined Alevism as a branch of Shiism as it is practiced in Azerbaijan. Some of the answers of the participants including their approaches in this context are as follows:

K5: *"I consider Alevism as a tariqa within Islam."*

In fact, this approach points to an understanding that is close to the definition of Alevism in Turkey. However, another opinion emphasizing the relationship between Alevism and the state was also expressed:

K2: *"In my opinion, Alevism in Turkey are a minority group that has been used by the state from time to time only as a political figure."*

Especially those who study politics and society address the relationship between Alevism and the state from this perspective. In the history of the state, it has been frequently observed that the state has from time to time consolidated its rule through minority groups such as Alevis, sent a message to the rest of the society and made a social design there.

On the other hand, the research also revealed that Alevis were labelled as a "marginalised group", this description that is frequently used by political Islamists in Turkey:

K8: *"When I think of Alevis, I think of a marginal religious group in Turkey. But to be honest, I don't have a clear knowledge about Alevis in detail. I mean, we have Shiism. Alevis are like a Shiite school in Turkey. I have an idea that this is the case."*

Going beyond marginalisation, participant P4 stated that he sees Alevis as a formation outside of Islam and even against Islam. It was also noteworthy that he made this determination on the basis of prayer.

K4: *"I see Alevism as a tariqa against Islam with its current structure and practices. It is as if Alevism is different from Shiism, because they don't pray properly."*

In addition, there were also participants who made a distinction between Alevism and Shiism. In doing so, they also drew attention to the treatment of Alevism in Turkey. In fact, it was emphasized that such oppression is carried out under state control and in a conscious and deliberate manner. As a result of this, it was underlined that the contradictions and disinformation in the understanding and practices of Alevism that have emerged today are understandable. From this point of view, Alevi-Sunni and Alevi-State relations were also tried to be placed in a reasonable framework. Differences in rituals and practices within Alevism were made sense of in this way. In doing so, it was noteworthy that the same participant contradicted himself and likened Alevism to Christianity rather than Islam in the later part of his speech.

K1: *"In my opinion, our understanding of Shiism is different from the understanding of Alevism in Turkey. But I think there has been a serious pressure on Alevi in Turkey over time. I can even say that this systematic pressure has led to the assimilation of that group. In other words, I understand that as a result of being subjected to this kind of violence, that group was forced to consolidate within the society. In other words, I think this was an inevitable behavior in order to preserve their belief system. They consolidated, they acted together and systematically. But they kept their distance from Islam in terms of Sunni belief, which I think is understandable. Thus, over time, they distanced themselves from both Islamic rituals and the belief system. In this way, they protected themselves in a way, and in this process they created their own customs and rituals. But there are many practices that have nothing to do with Islam. But the practices that Alevi have now do not exist in Shiism. For example, it seemed very strange to me that Alevi drink alcohol and worship at the same time. Or they say we don't need to pray because Hazrat Ali performed our prayers for us. Yes, what can I say to such an understanding? In this way, I think Alevi thought is more similar to the Christian view of Jesus Christ than Shiism, because they have a similar understanding."*

Furthermore, K11 stated that he sees Alevism as a cultural formation, especially as it is considered in the western world.

K11: *"Alevi and Alevism seem to me like a belief group, like a belief group in the early period. I mean, as far as I can see, it looks like a belief group, but when you analyze its content, you come across a different structure. It seems to have more cultural elements than religious elements. In this way, in the end, it looks more like a cultural structure trying to survive rather than a belief group. Like a cultural formation."*

As a result, even in this study of 12 participants, it is understood that the Shiites in Azerbaijan have a very different definition of Alevi in Turkey. We have already emphasized that their knowledge about Alevism is mostly through social media and media due to their lack of contact with Alevi. Nevertheless, it is understood that there are those who define Alevism as a sect as well as those who see it as a non-religious formation. However, it is noteworthy that none of the participants linked Alevism with Shiism. The fact that the relationship between Alevism and Shiism is expressed in terms of prayer is also a remarkable finding for this study.

The Djemevi question, which is one of the questions asked to test the participants' knowledge about Alevism, has an important place in this study. It was found that

none of the participants had ever been to a Djemevi. However, it was observed that some of the participants had information about the Djemevi and the Djem ceremony held there by watching videos on the internet.

Even the differences in the participants' opinions about the Cemevi, which can be considered the most prominent institution of the Alevi tradition, is enough to show how much they know about Alevism. One of the participants said that he had seen this institution, which is so important for Alevism, in movies.

K6: "Djemevi is a place where Alevs gather for religious ceremonies as far as I have seen in movies and stuff."

Another participant made a similar statement. However, the striking point in his definition was that he described what was done in Djem as a "strange religious ritual". It was also noteworthy that he described what was done in the Djem ceremony as a practice outside of Islam. In fact, without realizing it, the participant was defining Alevs as an entity outside Islam. If you define a group as an entity outside of Islam, it means that you no longer allow for a comparison between that group and Shiism. The same participant continued by making a comparison between a mosque and a djemevi. He emphasized that a Djemevi is unnecessary when there is a mosque. With this he actually wanted to reinforce his previous statements. At the next stage, he mentioned the presence of women in the Djemevi. He also went on to criticize the Djem House and the Djem ceremony in the harshest terms through the practices during the Samah. In fact, at the beginning of the interview, he stated that he had no knowledge about both the Djem house and the Djem ceremony, but he criticized the Alevs based on the stereotypes in his mind codes. In fact, as a Shiite, what he expressed here was no different from the statements of an average Sunni in Turkey.

K7: "I have seen Djemevi's and the Djem ceremony performed there on TV and the internet. I mean, I think a strange religious ritual is performed there. Actually, I didn't see that what is done there has much to do with Islam. On the other hand, we already have a mosque. We don't have a separate place from the mosque. For example, in a mosque, in any mosque, do men and women sit together and do things like games and halay like they do there? I have never witnessed that."

It is understood that other participants had a similar approach. It is understood that the Shiite participants, who do not know the historical formation process of

Alevism, make analyzes similar to the Sunnis in Turkey from their own perspectives. In this respect, it is seen that Shiism in Azerbaijan has more similarities with Sunnis than Alevism in Turkey. Statements that strengthen this determination are also seen in the statements of the participants. Because the participant states that Sunnis and Shiites pray together in the same mosques in Azerbaijan. It is understood that they express a closeness with Sunnis through mosques and prayer. On the other hand, they criticize Alevism and Alevis on the same instruments. In order to strengthen their theses, they cite as evidence conversations that can be called street discussions without any academic basis.

K3: "Before the Djemevi, the following question comes to my mind: If Alevis are Muslims, why did they build a special Djemevi in Turkey when there are mosques? In Azerbaijan, Shiites and Sunnis pray together in the same mosque. So what is the origin of this Djemevi? I mean, I don't understand this. I researched this and even discussed it with a history teacher."

On the other hand, it has been determined that there are also understandings that liken Djemi to a meditation like Yoga. Therefore, it is understood that the participant has no knowledge about the religious motifs of Djem, its historical formation, the content of the ritual. In fact, most of the participants admitted this at the beginning of the interview. However, it is noteworthy that despite admitting this lack of knowledge, they criticize Alevism in such extreme terms.

K4: "Djem: An interesting assembly where people play a bağlama and relax a bit."

In order to test the participants' perceptions of Alevism in more detail, the concepts of Alevism were asked together with the following question: What are your views on these concepts?

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Zâkir Dede (Imam) Djemevi Duvaz Watchman

On the other hand, it is understood in this study that the participants have almost no knowledge about the basic concepts specific to Alevis. Among these concepts, only "Dede" and "Samah" were found to have a basic level of knowledge, while most of the other concepts were heard for the first time.

K11: *"I have heard the term Kızılbaş. Kızılbaş used to be called the followers of Shah Ismail. So it is a concept used in history. But as far as I know, this concept is mostly used in Turkey by Sunnis to denigrate or insult Alevis. I honestly don't know why they do this. In other words, saying that you are Kızılbaş means that you are not Sunni according to them."*

The following question was asked in order to show whether or not the participants had a relationship between Alevism and Shiism in their minds: *"What do Alevism and Shiism have in common or different according to you?"*

Participants could not establish a healthy connection between Shi'ism and Alevism because they had so little knowledge on basic issues about Alevism. However, the general opinion is that Alevism has absolutely nothing in common with Shiism, especially in rituals and practices.

In order to get a more organized answer, the participants were asked the same question again in a different format: *"Do you think that the differences or similarities between Alevism and Shiism could affect the relations between the two countries in the future?"*

This study shows that Shiites conduct their relations with Turkey mostly through ethnic nationalism. Therefore, it is seen that they are able to develop a relationship on this plane despite the fact that the majority of the Turkish population is Sunni. For this reason, it has been observed that the participants think that the relations between the two countries will not be shaped by the belief systems of those living in Turkey.

It is seen that among the participants, although their numbers are small, there are those who take an objective approach. In addition, it seems that they have no historical knowledge about Alevism. Therefore, it is seen that they stated that they see Alevism as a branch of Shiism in the first place. However, even among those with this approach, prayer remains a distinguishing factor. It has even been expressed that they think differently about other practices such as pilgrimage. From this perspective, they define Alevism as a marginal group in their minds. While doing this, it is understood that they based on the closeness of the practices of the Islamic religion and the Alevis. In this confusion of thought, it is seen that they perceive Alevism as a formation whose cultural elements predominate.

K9: *"I mean, I don't have very detailed information about Alevism and Alevis, but I have an idea that Alevism is a branch of Shiism. But in terms of worship, I think they*

are a bit different from Shiites. For example, Shiites are devoted to worship, they pray and fast. But it seems that Alevis have different practices. As far as I know, Alevis are not as sensitive about this issue as Shiites. In other words, it is as if Alevis stay away from prayer with the idea that "Hazrat Ali led our prayers". They seem to have similar thoughts and practices about pilgrimage. I don't have very detailed information, but they are a bit more like a marginalized version of Shiism. They are a bit more distanced from the Islamic rituals and practices. They have moved a little bit away from the dimension of worship and thus differentiated themselves. I feel like they are a different group with cultural elements in their worship."

What was understood from the statements and attitudes of the participants during the interviews was very clear: Shiites in Azerbaijan considered themselves closer to Sunnis than Alevis in Turkey. Because even though it was not directly stated during the interviews, this was clearly understood between the lines of the conversation. In order to clarify whether this finding that emerged during the study was correct or not, this question was asked to the participants more clearly: *"Do you feel closer to Sunnis or Alevis in Turkey in terms of faith, and why?"*

It was observed that the majority of the participants gave abstaining answers to this question. This is because the participants did not have much knowledge about Alevism, which prevented them from answering this question in a healthy way.

Although many places were mentioned during the interviews, the participants were finally asked how they got information about Alevis and Alevism: *"From which source did you learn the most about Alevis?"*

It was observed that almost all of the participants' knowledge about Alevism was shaped by their own curiosity and searches on the internet. It is also understood that they are not sure about the reliability of the sources they have accessed.

Finally, the participants were asked what they thought about the relationship between the state and Alevis in Turkey. One of the participants who completed his university education in Turkey gave a remarkable answer to this question. According to him, the problem between Alevis and the state was not caused by Alevis. The reason for this problem was entirely related to the reflexes of the state. At this point, Alevis were no different from other minority groups. The state had a similar approach to all groups it saw as opposing it.

K7: "I mean, when we look at Turkey in general, it is understood that there are diseases in the state related to small marginalized groups. I mean, I think this is not only a situation related to Alevi. It's about Alevi, it's about Kurds, and it's about all minorities who go against the ruling government. I mean, for example, it is also related to Süleymançis if they go against the dominant will. In other words, the state has an attitude, a different attitude towards small, and such minorities. When it doesn't want them, it immediately marginalizes them. I think Alevi are in a similar situation."

5. Conclusion

This study examines the perception of Alevism among Shiites in Azerbaijan. The research was conducted by conducting in-depth interviews with 12 academics. As a result of the interviews, it was determined that most of the participants were Shiite and had limited knowledge about Alevism. Participants generally associated Alevism with Shiites in Iran and Turkey. In addition, many participants did not see Alevism as a branch of Islam.

In this extensive exploration of the perceptions of Azerbaijani Shiites regarding Turkish Alevi and Alevism, a multifaceted tapestry of attitudes emerges. The participants, all identifying as Shia and having previous exposure to Turkey, provide valuable insights shaped by varied experiences such as work, education, and interactions with diverse religious groups. Opinions about Alevism among participants vary; some associate it with Shiism, while others perceive it as a distinct cultural formation.

Furthermore, the study illuminates a notable lack of comprehensive knowledge about Alevi among Azerbaijani Shiites. Some individuals adopt more tolerant and inclusive perspectives, recognizing the links between Alevism and Shia Islam, while others adhere to stricter interpretations, viewing Alevism as a deviation from orthodox beliefs.

The participants' limited understanding of Alevism, often shaped by media and social platforms, reveals a gap in knowledge that may impact cross-cultural and belief interactions. Regarding Alevi-Shiite relations, the study indicates that Shiites in Azerbaijan feel closer to Sunnis in Turkey than to Turkish Alevi. This finding accentuates the impact of misinformation and limited exposure on shaping these perceptions.

One pivotal observation is the predominant influence of Turkish nationalism in shaping Azerbaijani perspectives on relations with Turkey. Ethnic nationalism emerges as a dominant factor, overshadowing religious similarities and shaping relations between Azerbaijanis and Turks. Historical, political, and cultural factors play pivotal roles in these bilateral relations.

According to historical data socio-political interactions between Azerbaijani Shiites and Alevi are complex. The perception of Alevism among Azerbaijani Shiites is multi-faceted, influenced by religious beliefs, historical context, and cultural interactions. Diverse perspectives, from recognizing Alevism's links to Shia Islam to considering it a separate religion, add layers of complexity.

The multifaceted exploration of Azerbaijani Shiite perceptions towards Alevi and Alevism in Turkey unravels a complex tapestry of theological, historical, and socio-political dynamics. The study delves into the theological commonalities and differences between Alevism and Shia Islam, shedding light on their shared reverence for the Ahl al-Bayt and the concept of Imam, while highlighting distinctions in mystical practices and rituals, such as the central role of "velayat" in Alevi beliefs. While both fall under the broader umbrella of Shia Islam, Alevism's incorporation of mysticism and emphasis on concepts like "velayat" distinguish it from mainstream Shia practices. In conclusion, the comprehensive examination of the theological differences and similarities between Alevism and Shiism provides valuable context for understanding the complexities within these religious traditions.

Azerbaijani Shiites, predominantly identifying as Shia Muslims, exhibit varying views on Alawism. In conclusion, the relations between Azerbaijani Shiites and Alevi are shaped by a multitude of factors, including historical legacies, theological distinctions, socio-political dynamics, and geopolitical influences.

Understanding the theological nuances is crucial in navigating the intricate web of perceptions. The examination of Djemevi, a crucial element of Alevi tradition, uncovers participants' unfamiliarity, relying on internet videos for insights. Alevism's emphasis on spiritual purification through unique rituals like the "Djem" ceremony diverges from mainstream Shia practices, illustrating the need for nuanced discussions about religious diversity within the broader umbrella of Shia Islam.

In addition, many participants stated that they did not find Djem ceremonies suitable for Islam. However, they also noted that there are similarities between Shiism and Alevism in terms of the love for Hz. Ali, the idea that he deserves the caliphate, and the expectation of Mehdi. Some participants believe that the group has marginalized itself and moved away from Islam due to pressure on Alevis by the state in Turkey. Some participants likened Alevism more to Christianity than Shiism due to their expectation of Mehdi. The study accentuates the significance of dispelling misconceptions and fostering accurate knowledge dissemination about Alevi beliefs and practices, particularly the often-misunderstood Djemevi ceremonies. The participants' responses to specific Alevi concepts reveal a limited understanding, with only a basic awareness of terms like "Dede" and "Samah."

Notably, the study unveils a striking divergence in the participants' views on Alevism's relationship with Shiism, with some acknowledging similarities and others emphasizing differences. The influence of prayer as a defining factor in distinguishing Alevism is a noteworthy finding, contributing to the intricate mosaic of perceptions. Some see it as a tariqa within Islam, while others perceive it as a political tool manipulated by the state. The notion of Alevism being a marginalized group or even outside of Islam is echoed, showcasing the complexity of perspectives shaped by historical, political, and religious factors.

Socio-political interactions emerge as a crucial dimension, influenced by a myriad of factors such as religious identity, historical developments, and external influences. The role of the Safavid sect in shaping Azerbaijan's socio-political landscape underscores the historical intricacies at play.

The analysis of the perception of Alevism in Azerbaijan reveals the diversity of perspectives within the Azerbaijani Shia community. Varying views, influenced by individual beliefs and historical contexts, contribute to the complexity of how Alevism is perceived. Looking ahead, the future of Shiite and Alevi relations in Azerbaijan will be shaped by geopolitical dynamics and religious affiliations.

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Participant

Name / Surname:

Age: Gender: Belief: Education: Occupation:

1. How do you define yourself in terms of faith? Shia / Sunni / Jafari / Other
2. Have you been to Turkey before? How much do you follow Turkey?
3. Have you had contact with an Alevi before? If yes, what is your impression of him/her?
4. What is your opinion about Alevis and Alevism in Turkey?
5. How do you define Alevism: Sect, Denomination, Religion, Cultural formation?
6. Have you ever been to a Djemevi? What do you know about Djemevi?
7. Have you ever seen a Djem ceremony? What is your opinion about the Djem ceremony?
8. What are your views on these concepts?

Kizilbash Companionship⁹ Shunned¹⁰ Samah¹¹ Twelve Services Zâkir¹² Dede(Imam)¹³ Djemevi¹⁴ Duvaz Watchman¹⁵

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- 9 *Müsahtiplik* (roughly, "Companionship") is a covenant relationship between two men of the same age, preferably along with their wives. In a ceremony in the presence of a dede the partners make a lifelong commitment to care for the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of each other and their children. The ties between couples who have made this commitment is at least as strong as it is for blood relatives, so much so that *müsahtiplik* is often called spiritual brotherhood (*manevis kardeşlik*). The children of covenanted couples may not marry.
 - 10 Düşkün
 - 11 A family of ritual dances characterized by turning and swirling, is an inseparable part of any *Djem*. *Samah* is performed by men and women together, to the accompaniment of the Bağlama. The dances symbolize (for example) the revolution of the planets around the Sun (by man and woman turning in circles), and the putting off of one's self and uniting with God.
 - 12 This position represents Bilal ibn al-Harith. S/he plays the bağlama and recites songs and prayers.
 - 13 This is the leader of the Djem who represents Muhammad and Ali. The Dede receives confession from the attendees at the beginning of the ceremony. He also leads funerals, Müsahtiplik, marriage ceremonies and circumcisions. The status of Dede is hereditary and he must be a descendant of Ali and Fatima.
 - 14 Alevi religious, cultural and other social activities take place in assembly houses (Djemevi).
 - 15 This position represents Abu Dharr al-Ghifari. S/he is the assistant to the Rehber. S/he is the Djem keeper responsible for keeping the faithful calm

9. What do Alevism and Shiism have in common or different according to you?
10. Do you think that the differences or similarities between Alevism and Shiism could affect the relations between the two countries in the future?
11. Do you feel closer to Sunnis or Alevis in Turkey in terms of faith, and why?
12. From which source did you learn the most about Alevis?

Family

Religious leader

Media/Social Media

Environment

Personal experience

Other